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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000165

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 3/15/07: MORE ON VP, MSG, "CLEAN UP"
CAMPAIGNS, MEDIA INTIMIDATION, BLOGS

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Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D)

Summary

1. (C) A new Fiji Vice President may now be selected in April. The interim government has admitted publicly a Melanesian Spearhead Group snub: not allowing Commodore Bainimarama to sign the MSG constitution. The RFMF is investigating 22 soldiers for pay-office malfeasance, but is not looking internally for bigger fish. Police investigations of beating deaths by soldiers are stalled until the RFMF completes its own investigations. Intimidation of media continues. Blogs are arising to fill gaps in media coverage. Pacific Magazine is worried its Fiji correspondent may be taken in. RFMF meddling in non-security issues continues. End summary.

A new VP in April?

2. (C) Ratu Ovini Bokini, Chairman of the GCC, has informed the media that the next GCC meeting will take place in April. Earlier he had indicated June. Bokini said Minister of Fijian Affairs Ganilau has advised the only item on the agenda will be approval of a new Vice President. Under the Fiji Constitution, the President selects a Vice Presidential candidate who then needs approval from the GCC. Bainimarama's removal of then-VP Madraiwiwi in December (with Madraiwiwi then offering his resignation) created the vacancy. Per previous reporting, Suva rumor suggests the VP nominee will be interim Foreign Minister Ratu Epeli Nailatikau. We hear another possible nominee, RFMF LtCol Tevita Mara, declined the offer. (Note: President Iloilo wants to visit Australia for his regular medical check-up, but a constitutional quandary would develop absent a VP to assume the Acting President role.)

Interim Government publicly admits MSG snub

3. (C) Interim AG Sayed-Khaiyum admitted publicly on March 14 that PNG PM Somare informed the interim administration that Bainimarama will not be allowed to sign the Melanesian Spearhead Group constitution in Vanuatu on March 23. Sayed-Khaiyum and interim Foreign Minister Nailatikau plan to attend the ceremony in any case.

RFMF cleaning itself up?

4. (C) Twenty two soldiers on the RFMF "pay office" staff remain under investigation for alleged malfeasance (welcome news); however, observers have noted no mention of a "clean

up" for the RFMF regimental funds, which according to long-standing rumor were grossly misused in years past. The regimental funds accumulate from a forced contribution by all soldiers and are intended for general welfare. The RFMF has refused any outside audit efforts for the regimental funds for at least the past 15 years. Former RFMF Commander Ratu Epeli Ganilau, who pushed for Commodore Bainimarama's promotion to RFMF Commander and who is now Minister of Fijian Affairs in the interim government, is rumored to be one of those who drew from the regimental fund for personal use in the 1990s.

RFMF and abuse reports

15. (U) Police investigations into alleged RFMF beating deaths of two Fijian men are stalled. The RFMF says its internal investigations take priority, after which police will be allowed access to the soldiers. There has been no indication how long the RFMF internal investigations will take. The earlier of the beatings occurred January 5. Meanwhile, media report that soldiers severely beat a young Indo-Fijian man in Suva on the evening of March 12. Supposedly he was a passenger in a car that attempted to run through a military check point. The Intelligentsiya blog says the young Fijian man who had been reported beaten to death by soldiers in Vanua Levu a few weeks ago actually did not die, but he suffered severe injuries. His family reportedly has been unwilling to take him to a hospital for fear of retribution. Interim AG Sayed-Khaiyum and Fiji Human Rights Commission (FHRC) Director Shaista Shameem announced on March 14 that the RFMF has provided them a "comprehensive report" responding to all allegations of abuse of human rights since the coup. Shameem said this will allow the FHRC to proceed

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with its normal dispute-resolution processes.

More media intimidation

16. (U) The Managing Director of the FM96 radio station and the FijiVillage.com web site, William Parkinson, and a member of his senior staff, Vijay Narayan (a recent IVP recipient), reportedly were called in on March 14 to meet Capt. Teleni. The official explanation was a concern that a chat-room linked to FijiVillage contained discussion insulting to President Iloilo. A short while later the chat-room closed down. We note also that FijiVillage's "Yellow Bucket" feature, which has long offered savvy observations on Fiji political developments, suddenly disappeared from FijiVillage overnight.

And blogs proliferate; Pacific Magazine concern

17. (C) As mainstream media feel the heat, blogs critical of the RFMF and interim government are blooming. Per previous reporting, intelligentsiya.com is a pioneer. It offers links to several others. The RFMF is clearly frustrated it has not been able to interrogate participants. Note: we received an e-mail from Floyd Takeuchi, publisher of Pacific Magazine, who is concerned about their Fiji correspondent, Fiji citizen Ricardo Morris. Morris had received word from the RFMF that he would be taken in, allegedly for having a role in the intelligentsiya site. Last we heard Morris was still nervous, but he had not received the knock on the door.

RFMF dabbling in non-security issues continues

18. (C) RFMF meddling in society at large is also continuing, contrary to Bainimarama assurances that it had ended. Deputy Commander Capt. (N) Teleni and Land Forces Commander Col. Driti led RFMF involvement in a Post Fiji (post office) dispute between employees and the board of directors. Driti publicly warned Post Fiji CEO Peni Mau, whom the board removed from office last week, "not to manipulate" employees into strike action. Even more mundane, RFMF soldiers provided the muscle to force a car dealership in Suva to bow

to the will of the interim Minister of Transport in a land dispute concerning a traffic round-about. The case was awaiting a Supreme Court appeal. Rumors are floating of an RFMF plan to insert military personnel throughout the government bureaucracy to keep an eye on everything.
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